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## SERMON.

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MATT. xxviii. 20.

*And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*

WHENEVER the Sovereign, by charter, or commission, invests certain individuals, or bodies of men, with power to do certain acts, the privilege, or exclusive power of doing such acts, is strictly limited to those persons, who derive their authority in no degree from their fitness to discharge the offices to which they are appointed, but wholly and solely from the tenor of the royal commission. Thus, to give an instance which is familiar to all; there are in every county, and in every considerable town, certain persons appointed by commission or charter from the Crown to act as Justices, or Guardians of the public peace; and by the terms of their commission, all other persons are virtually excluded, and disqualified from doing, with legal effect, any of the acts which those who are named in the commission have full authority to do. It may happen that some of the magistrates, so appointed, may be very ignorant of the laws which they have to administer, and may in other respects, be very unfit to have been put into the commission at all; and that others, far better qualified to discharge with credit the office of a magistrate, might easily have been found. Nevertheless, if such persons merely on the ground of their superior qualifications should take upon themselves, without any warrant from the Crown, to act as magis-

trates, and to administer justice, every body knows, that their acts, however unexceptionable in themselves, would be absolutely void in law and of none effect ; whilst, on the other hand, the legal acts of those who are duly commissioned, however insufficient, or even worthless, they themselves may be, are good and valid, because they are done in the sovereign's name, and by virtue of the royal commission, or charter.

Now we have in the words preceding the text, and in the Gospels of St. Mark, and St. John, the terms of the commission in which our Lord conferred on the eleven disciples, full power to act as chief rulers of his Church, to bind and to loose in the administration of His word and sacraments, and to go forth as his Apostles into all nations : and it is evident—though some, I am aware, would be very glad to deny it—that when He gave this commission to them, and to their successors to the end of time, he delegated these powers to them alone, and absolutely excluded all others from acting with effect as his Ambassadors and Stewards of the mysteries of God. Many men, who are not so called and separated to the work of the ministry, are doubtless, eminently qualified by their disposition, talents, and attainments, to act as ministers of Christ ; yet if they presume to do so without Christ's appointment, derived to them by succession from the Apostles, we have no more reason for supposing, that the sacraments administered by their hands can be valid, than that the acts of any individual are valid who assumes the office of a civil magistrate, without any warrant from the crown. As God alone had power to appoint an order of Priesthood in the Jewish Church, so Christ alone has power to appoint the orders of ministers in his Church ; and to those of His appointment, and to none but them, has he given the promise, “ Lo, I am with

you always, even unto the end of the world." Man by his own authority is no more able to make a minister of Christ, than he is able to make an Angel of God.

It is, then, to every right-minded christian, a matter of high importance to ascertain, whether those who claim to act as Christ's ambassadors, to preach his word, and to administer the Sacraments of His grace, are really acting by His authority or not; and it is quite wonderful, that people will take men's words for this, and will submit to them, as ministers of Christ, and as guides in things spiritual, without asking for their *credentials*; simply taking it for granted, because they come with Christ's name on their lips, that Christ has sent them. Now there are only two ways in which it is possible for any man to shew, that he has a commission from God to execute the priestly office, or to minister before Him in divine services: first, by direct, immediate, divine appointment, confirmed by the presence of miraculous gifts; or secondly, by regular descent, or succession, from those who were originally so appointed, with authority to transmit the same spiritual character to their successors. We find accordingly, that when God empowered Moses, to order the whole frame work of the service of the tabernacle, to set apart the tribe of Levi as His ministers, and to consecrate Aaron, and his descendants, as His priests, He invested him with the highest gifts of miracle and prophecy; and shewed by many miraculous proofs, especially in the matter of Korah, that He would suffer none to intrude into that holy office, and to approach his altar with unhallowed fire. The Aaronical priesthood being thus established, and perpetuated in the way of natural descent, all that was required of those who preferred a claim to the offices of the priesthood, was to prove that they belonged to the family of

Aaron, and that they were personally free from certain legal impurities and imperfections. But if their *pedigree* was defective, no moral fitness, or legal purity, could procure them admission to the priestly office. Of this we have a striking instance in the catalogue, which is given in the book of Ezra, of those who returned with Zerubbabel from Babylon to Jerusalem, for there, after reckoning up the families of the Priests, and Levites, and Nethinims, it is said, that "of the children of the Priests, the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, these sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found ; therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood." Thus too, when it pleased God to ordain the seventy presbyters—or elders of the Jewish Sanhedrim in the wilderness and their ordination supplied the model in which the christian ministry was subsequently formed—He did it by sending down his spirit upon them, and endowing them with the gift of prophecy ; and these elders transmitted in unbroken succession down to our Saviour's time, the same spiritual character and authority to others, whom they ordained presbyters by the imposition of their hands.

In the same way the Lord Jesus, after His resurrection, sent forth His Apostles with full divine authority, even as the Father had sent Him ; He made them ruling presbyters of his Church, by breathing on them the Holy Spirit, and giving them power in the administration of his Sacraments, and the promulgation, and relaxation of ecclesiastical censures, to remit, and to retain sins ; and after His ascension, He confirmed their mission, by investing them with miraculous powers. It does not appear,

from any thing that is left on record in the Gospels, or in any of the Apostolical writings, that Christ, though in effect, He enjoined them to ordain others to succeed them in their ministry to the end of time, expressly appointed the *manner* in which the successors of the Apostles were to be ordained. But in following the divinely appointed model of the Jewish presbytery, they, doubtless, acted under divine direction. He Himself made *them* ministers of the new covenant, by breathing on them; to shew that the Holy Spirit proceeded immediately from Himself. But since they could not arrogate the same authority to themselves without impiety, they copied the ordinations of the Jewish presbytery, which were conferred by the laying on of hands; and in this same way, in every true branch of Christ's apostolic church, the three-fold orders of the christian ministry have been preserved in unbroken succession to our days; and "no man taketh this honor to himself," \* except those who are called to the ministerial office by persons whose authority to do so is derived, through the Apostles, from Christ Himself.

It is, I believe, an opinion very generally entertained, and assiduously propagated by modern dissenters, that every christian congregation has the right of electing its own ministers. It really would not be half so absurd to say, that soldiers have a right to appoint their own officers, or criminals have a right to elect their own judges. If the christian laity HAVE this right, I should wish to know, when, and how they got it. When was it that Christ, as king and sole head of His church, parted with his supreme authority, of sending forth his own ambassadors to reconcile the world to God? When was it that

\* Heb. v. 4.

men *acquired* this power? Was it at the first foundation of the church? and if not, *When* was it given them? We have a right to ask these questions; for men who take upon themselves to invade Christ's sovereignty, and to break through the order which He has prescribed, have need to show a plain and unquestionable warrant, from God himself, to justify their proceedings.

But to questions like these, no satisfactory answer can be given; for if Christ did not, from the very first, give authority to the people to elect *His* ministers, it cannot be pretended, that he did so at any subsequent time. And that he did not, at the first, give them this authority, is demonstrable from this plain reason; that the ministers of Christ, existed before the church of Christ; that the church, in fact, was called into existence, and its continuance provided for, by the Apostles; who, as the number of believers increased in all countries, "ordained them elders in every city," and gave to the chief presbyters, or bishops, such for instance as Timothy and Titus, power to ordain others also. They had their authority from Christ, as Christ the mediator and founder of the church, had *His* from God; and both our Lord and his Apostles seem, if I may so say, to have expressed a more than usual solicitude in the enunciation of this truth, that the authority to execute any office of the christian ministry, cannot be conferred by man, but must proceed, either immediately, or derivatively from God. Thus, when Christ himself consecrated his Apostles, by breathing the Holy Spirit on them, and giving them power to preach the word, and to administer the sacraments of the church in *His* name, He told them, in express terms, that he had full authority to do so, inasmuch as all power was given to him in heaven and earth; and therefore, that He sent them forth, even as the

Father had sent Him. And it is the constant language of St. Paul, whose call was extraordinary and miraculous, that he received his authority as a minister of Christ, not from men, but from God. Thus, to the Romans he styles himself "a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, by whom," he adds, "we have received grace and apostleship."\* To the Corinthians he calls himself "an Apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God."† To the Galatians, "an Apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ."‡ To the Ephesians and Colossians, "an Apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God."§ And to Timothy, "an Apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God, our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, who is our hope."|| And that he, and, by parity of reason, the rest of the Apostles, had power to convey to others the same spiritual gift for the work of the ministry, which they had themselves received, is not only implied in the words of Christ, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,"\*\* but is more plainly asserted by St. Paul in his exhortation to Timothy, "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands;"†† and in that passage of his Epistle to Titus, where he reminds him, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst ordain elders in every city."‡‡ The church catholic has, therefore, from the beginning, held fast to the practice of episcopal ordination, which she received from the Apostles; and as she maintains that none are rightly ordained, except those who are ordained by bishops, so likewise she holds, that all who are so ordained, receive the same ordinary spiritual

\* Romans i. 1—5.

† 1 Cor. i. 1.

‡ Gal. i. 1.

§ Eph. i. 1. § Col. i. 1.

|| 1 Tim. i. 1.

\*\* Mat. xxviii. 20.

†† 2 Tim. i. 6.

‡‡ Titus i. 5.



powers, as the Apostles themselves received from Christ, and which they transmitted by the laying on of their hands. For this reason, in the ordination of priests, or presbyters, her bishops have always used the form of words which our Lord himself employed, "Receive the Holy Ghost,"\* that is a certain spiritual power, "now committed unto thee, by the imposition of our hands, for the office and work of a priest in the church of God;" and she stedfastly holds, that none who are not thus episcopally ordained, have power from Christ to administer the sacraments of his grace.

But it is said, that this opinion is very illiberal and uncharitable, since it goes to unchurch all christian communities whose ministers have not received episcopal ordination. Now liberality and charity are very good *things*, when rightly understood; and very good *words*, whether people rightly understand them, or not. But the question here is not in the smallest degree a question of liberality, or charity, but simply of fact. If those, who perform the part of ministers in any congregation, without being episcopally ordained, have nevertheless power to rule and to feed the flock of Christ, and to administer the sacraments, I ask again, Who gave it them? From man they could not receive it, that is certain. And if they say, from Christ; we ask them to shew us their credentials. Are they ordinary or extraordinary? That they have not received their commission in the ordinary way, that is through the Bishops of the church in regular succession from the Apostles, they themselves confess. Their calling and mission, if it be from Christ, and not from man, must therefore be extraordinary, that is miraculous; and if in this way they can

\* John xx. 22.

prove to us that Christ has sent them, then, and not 'till then, we may receive them as his Ambassadors.

Meanwhile instead of troubling ourselves about "those that are without," let us look to the advantages which the church possesses in her three-fold orders of ministers, whose institution we trace upwards, through an unbroken line of Bishops, to the Apostles, and to Christ himself. Not to dwell on collateral points, or points of minor importance, let us consider the great happiness which we enjoy in the assurance, that the promise of Christ is fulfilled to his church, and that he is always present with his ministers, to bless their ministrations to his people. With respect to our Bishops, who are the chief pastors and overseers of Christ's flock, the centres of unity and spiritual power, besides the benefit which the church receives from their superintendence, in the maintenance of general order, and the enforcement of adherence to catholic doctrine amongst the clergy, it is by the laying on of their hands that the presbyters and deacons of the church receive authority, as from Christ himself, to execute their respective offices, "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." \* These ministers thus called and sent forth, appear in the character of Christ's Ambassadors, as the appointed stewards and dispensers of His mysteries; in the discharge of all holy offices they bear from Him a blessing to the faithful; and in His Sacraments they convey his special grace to all who worthily receive them.

Such, brethren, is our office and ministry, it is through us that Christ himself receives in baptism the children of the faithful, dedicates them to God, regenerates them

\* Eph. iv. 12.

by his spirit, and makes them sons of God, and heirs of everlasting life. By us they are catechized, and trained up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;"\* by us, acting in the name of Christ, and in His stead, they are fully instructed in the nature of the vows and promises which their sponsors made for them; and by us they are prepared in riper years to ratify and confirm these vows in their own persons, under the hands of the Bishop, and in the face of the congregation. By us, when they are more fully instructed in the mysteries of the Gospel, they are made partakers of that most holy sacrament, wherein our sinful bodies are made clean by Christ's body, and our souls are washed through in his most precious blood; for "the bread which we break is," indeed as St. Paul has said, "the communion of the body of Christ, and the cup which we bless, is the communion of the blood of Christ."† It is in this divine ordinance, that Christ is more especially present with the church. It is He who by His ministers, invites the people to His holy table. It is through His blessing on the consecrated elements, pronounced by His ministers, that a spiritual and heavenly virtue is imparted to the bread and wine, for the strengthening and refreshing of the soul; and by His communion with the Spirit, the faithful are made one with Christ, and Christ with them; so that their very bodies are sanctified and made capable of a glorious immortality. Again it is by our ministry that the holy estate of marriage is blessed and sanctified; with prayer to God, who at the beginning did create our first parents, Adam and Eve, and did sanctify and join them together in marriage, that he would pour in the newly married couple the riches of His grace, and sanctify and bless

\* Eph. vi. 4.

† 1 Corinthians, x. 16.

them, that they may please Him both in body and soul, "and live together in holy love unto their lives end."

It is we who are commissioned to bear the blessed message of peace and reconciliation to God, to the failing christian in the hour of sickness; and by us the pardon of sin is conveyed from Christ to those who truly repent; the promises of the Gospel are brought home with power; and the faithful are prepared against the hour of death, and are encouraged to hope, that, through the all-sufficient grace of their Redeemer, "after their departure hence in peace, and in God's favour, their souls will be received into his everlasting kingdom." And lastly, by us the mortal bodies of departed christians are committed to the grave, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in a sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself."\* In all these our ministrations Christ is with us always, according to his promise; and will continue with us to the end of the world.

In saying these things, I say with St. Paul, that "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake."† In magnifying our *office*, we magnify Christ, and Him only; for it is He alone, who gives to our various ministrations all their force and efficacy. And, as on the other hand, the word preached will never profit the hearer, whilst they regard only the preacher, and "receive it as the word of men, and not, as it is in truth, the word of God;"‡ and as the full blessing of the sacraments will never be felt,

\* Phil. iii. 21.      † 2 Cor. iv. 5.      ‡ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

except by those who have learnt to see Christ present in them, and offering Himself in them by His ministers, so, on the other hand, I am deeply convinced, that no man will ever "*fulfil* the ministry which he has received of the Lord,"† unless, under an awful sense of his great responsibility, he habitually considers, that he is always acting by Christ's authority committed to him, as a messenger from Him to men, and as a steward who must give account to his Lord.

Forasmuch, then, as our office is of so great excellency, and of so great difficulty, with what great care and study ought we to apply ourselves, as well that we may show ourselves dutiful and thankful to the Lord, who hath placed us in so high a dignity; as also to beware, that neither we ourselves offend, nor be occasion that others offend. Having, therefore, printed in our remembrance how great a treasure is committed to our charge, let us pray earnestly to God for his Holy Spirit, and give ourselves continually to the study of his holy word; that by His heavenly assistance, and by daily reading and weighing of the scriptures, we may grow riper and stronger in our ministry, and may rightly and duly administer His word and sacraments, to the benefit of our people, and to the deliverance of our own souls, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, &c.

\* Col. iv. 17.